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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 000014

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS; NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#) [NO](#) [TH](#)

SUBJECT: Fourth round of GSL-LTTE talks set to begin in Thailand; President sends letter hitting out at Norway

Refs: (A) Colombo-SA/INS 01/02/03 Fax
- (B) Colombo 2355, and previous

(U) Classified by Lewis Amselem, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: The fourth round of talks between the GSL and the Tamil Tigers is set to take place in Thailand, January 6-9. Topics on the agenda include the security zones in Jaffna, which the Tigers want reduced in size. There is still some confusion as to the exact nature of Muslim representation at the talks. In other news, President Kumaratunga has sent a letter to Norway critical of its role in the recent import of radio equipment for the Tigers. Both the GSL and LTTE seem keen to keep up the momentum of the peace process, but it is not clear whether this set of talks will lead to any breakthroughs. END SUMMARY.

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Talks in Thailand
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2. (U) The fourth round of talks between the Sri Lankan government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) is set to take place in Thailand, January 6-9. (Note: The last round of talks took place in Oslo in early December. The previous two rounds took place in Thailand in September and November.) The venue will be the Rose Garden Hotel in the Bangkok area.

3. (C) Agenda: Neither the Norwegian government facilitators nor the parties have issued a detailed agenda for the talks. In public statements this week, however, GSL and LTTE officials announced that the issue of how to handle the Sri Lankan military's "high security zones" will be one of the key matters under discussion. (Note: Per Ref B, the LTTE has demanded that the government reduce the size of its security zones in Jaffna. Before agreeing to this, the military has set conditions, including that the LTTE disarm any cadre entering the areas. The LTTE rejected this proposal.) According to reports, another important agenda item is the issue of federalism and what sort of federal model could be developed that would meet with the approval of the two sides. (Note: At the last round of talks in December, the LTTE -- in a major breakthrough -- agreed that it would work toward creation of a federal system in Sri Lanka.) Government sources have also said additional items on the agenda include: humanitarian assistance for the north and east; and human rights issues related to LTTE-controlled areas.

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Muslim Representation Still an Issue
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4. (SBU) Both sides' delegations to the talks are basically the same as for previous rounds. Members of the GSL team include senior ministers G.L. Peiris and Milinda Moragoda, and chief of the Peace Secretariat Ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke. Because security zone issues are due for discussion, Defense Secretary Austin Fernando and military representatives are also slated to join the GSL team. Members of the LTTE team include senior negotiator Anton Balasingham, Adele Balasingham (wife of Anton), LTTE political chief S.P. Tahmilchelvam, and LTTE eastern military commander Karuna.

5. (C) There is still some confusion as to the exact nature of Muslim representation. Late last week, the government announced that Sri Lanka Muslim Congress (SLMC) leader and senior minister Rauf Hakeem would once again join the GSL team. This led to a cacophony of criticism from Hakeem's many political opponents in the SLMC and the Muslim community at large. The critics asserted that the government should not allow Hakeem on the GSL team because he was not "a true representative" of Sri Lanka's Muslims. Another point made was that Muslims should form their own team at the talks and not be included on the government's team. Stung by the

criticism, Hakeem demanded that the GSL and the LTTE allow him to represent Sri Lanka's Muslims as a third party at the talks. As of today, January 3, Hakeem's request has not been granted and the issue of Muslim representation still is up in the air, although Hakeem reportedly will be at the talks in some capacity.

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Kumaratunga Hits Out at GoN
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16. (SBU) In other peace process-related developments: As foreshadowed in Ref B, President Kumaratunga has sent the Norwegian Prime Minister a letter criticizing GoN involvement in the recent import of radio equipment for the Tigers. The letter, which has been faxed to SA/INS, received extensive press play in Sri Lanka after the President's Office issued it as a press release on January 1.

17. (C) The letter, which was respectful in tone, asserted that the Norwegian Embassy acted improperly in allowing the radio equipment to be sent to it as a diplomatic consignment that could not be assessed customs duties. (Note: The embassy only agreed to do this after it received a specific request from the GSL on the matter.) The letter went on to state that the embassy's actions raised "serious questions about the impartiality of the Royal Norwegian government in relation to the negotiations." The letter did not ask the GoN to remove Ambassador Jon Westborg from his post, although some anti-peace process elements have publicly agitated for just that. The letter did note that the GoN should appreciate the "seriousness" of Westborg's actions, however. When asked about Kumaratunga's letter, Taranjit Sandhu, the polchief of the Indian High Commission, told us that he thought the letter was basically a way for Kumaratunga to show hard-liners in her party that she was doing something in reaction to their complaints.

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COMMENT
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18. (C) Despite the recent disagreement about the security zones, both sides seem keen to keep up the momentum of the peace process. The Norwegians have been quite effective in arranging the talks so that each round results in some sort of "breakthrough," e.g., the December round's announcement that the LTTE will aim for federalism. It is not clear what the Norwegians are planning to do this time, but it could involve some announcement re a framework for solving the complex security zone issue.

19. (C) As for Kumaratunga's letter, it is unfortunate that the Norwegians are coming under increasing criticism given their constructive role as facilitators. In hitting out at the GoN, the president clearly feels she has to pander to elements in her party and elsewhere that are at the very least skeptical about the peace process if not downright opposed. END COMMENT.

110. (U) Minimize considered.

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